Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C) (*Lk* 12:49-53)

The readings for this Sunday convey an impactful message, highlighting the sometimes difficult nature of authentic faith and the transformative power of God's love.

As we reflect on this Gospel passage, we may feel confusion and doubt. In the first part of the Gospel, Jesus emphasises that He has come to set the earth on fire. He speaks of a baptism with which He must be baptised, expressing great anguish until it is accomplished.

In the Bible, fire symbolises God. In the Old Testament, we see this in the book of Exodus, where Moses encounters the burning bush and the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites to the Promised Land. Similarly, the prophet Elijah prayed to the Lord, asking Him to demonstrate to the people that He is the true God and to turn their hearts back to Him. In response, fire from the Lord fell from heaven, consuming the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, the dust, and even the water in the trench. In the New Testament, after the Ascension of Jesus, the Blessed Mother and the apostles remained in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. On this day, the Holy Spirit descended upon them as fire.

This represents the fire that Jesus came to bring: the fire of love, the fire of truth, and the fire that can both divide and purify when it confronts injustice. He embodies a fire to love, a fire to stand for truth, a fire to forgive, a fire to heal, and a fire to oppose injustice. The culmination of this truth is seen on the cross, which is why He speaks of baptism; He must endure suffering for the salvation of humanity.

We should aim to be like fire, passionately igniting our love for God. This means prioritising Him in every aspect of our lives. Our fire should represent a deep longing to love everyone, uphold truth, and embrace all people. Just as fire purifies, we too should strive to bring purification to others through our own lives. **St. Augustine says, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O Lord".**

In the second part of the message, we hear Jesus declare that He has come to bring not peace, but division. He continues by saying that from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against

two and two against three. A father will be divided against his son, and a son against his father; a mother against her daughter, and a daughter against her mother; a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

Jesus speaks these words within His context. We know that the first Christians were Jews. Some people began to follow Jesus, which created tension within families. For instance, if the father became a follower of Jesus while the rest of the family remained Jewish, he might face challenges and opposition from his wife and children due to his faith. This situation illustrates the reality that living according to Gospel values can lead to conflict, even among loved ones.

The second reading today emphasizes perseverance in the face of difficulties, urging us to continue running the race of faith. Like the prophet Jeremiah in the first reading, who was persecuted for speaking the truth, followers of Christ can expect opposition and must remain steadfast in their commitment to justice and human dignity.

The division that Jesus speaks of may be evident in your own families, but remember that He has already addressed this issue. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Jesus was crucified for a reason, and we should always keep that in mind.

Be a person who shines brightly for Jesus, like a blazing fire. You are a fire that can heal, love, embrace, and purify others. If you are truly passionate about Jesus, the neglect, abandonment, and ridicule you may experience for your faith will not affect you, because Jesus faced similar challenges. Just as Jesus had victory over those trials, you will also have victory over them.

Fr. Deny